



Harriet Scott, del. et lith.

THE SEA LEOPARD.
(STENORHYNCHUS LEPTONYX.)

Sydney, N. S. W.—Thomas Richards, Government Printer.—1899.

The Sea Leopard.

(STENORHYNCHUS LEPTONYX.)

COMPARATIVELY few Seals inhabit the Southern Ocean, and only two species occur on the Coast of New South Wales. The figure represents the largest kind, the well-known Sea Leopard, so named on account of its spotted fur, the general colour of which is a silvery grey washed with yellow; the markings are irregular, sometimes lighter than the ground colour, with a darker border, and a few uniform black spots interspersed. Young specimens and females occur without them.

This Seal grows to a considerable size, and one specimen in the Australian Museum measured fully 10 feet in length; it was taken at Shoalhaven, in the Illawarra District, and the stomach contained a full-grown *Platypus*,—a proof that the animal must have gone far up the River into fresh water. A second (female) specimen, 7 feet in length, was obtained in October, 1870, at Double Bay, near Sydney, and kept alive for several days in the Museum grounds, where it fed on grass, no other food being at hand. It is not certain that a fish diet is absolutely necessary for the subsistence of this animal, and it is to be regretted that no experiments were made to settle this point. Dr. J. E. Gray, F.R.S., states, in one of his numerous papers on the Seal tribe, that the stomach of one contained the remains of fishes, a quantity of sea-weed, and some feathers of gulls. Our specimen would probably have subsisted on butcher's meat or fowls; but unfortunately before the trial could be made, the taxidermist had killed the creature. This Seal moved rather quickly, not unlike a snake, and turned to the right or left in an instant when in fear of attack. Water was thrown over her, but she appeared to dislike it, and lay shivering till quite dry again. The same species occurs on the coast of Tasmania. The mother produces a single young, which she protects with fin or flapper, and defends against the numerous enemies which are always in pursuit of such young creatures. It is stated that the female will not leave the spot whence her young has been taken, and grows furious in vainly attempting to save its life.

The occasional appearance of Seals in rivers or in lagoons, where they may have remained after a flood, has probably given rise to the fable of the "Bunyip." On one occasion a so-called Bunyip's skull was presented to the Australian Museum, but proved to be that of a malformed foal. At another time some terrified Murray natives pointed out their dreaded enemy on the other side of the river. There was certainly a large animal in the water, making a curious noise, but the night being dark it could not be seen. After a vain attempt to induce the natives to come across in their canoe, a shot was fired, the noise ceased, and a venerable he-goat was tracked the next morning to the scrub, where he had died of his wound.

It is to be deplored that such really beautiful and intelligent animals as Seals should have been destroyed so indiscriminately as they have been on this Coast. Collins, in his "Voyage to New South Wales," published in 1798, mentions that the rocks in Bass' Straits and other localities were covered with Fur Seals of great beauty, but at the present time they are rarely met with in these localities. The total number of species which visit the east and south coast does not exceed three or four. The following is a list of the Seals on record as taken in the Antarctic Ocean:—

1. The crab-eating Seal. *Lobodon carcinophaga*. On the packed ice, South Antarctic.
2. False Sea Leopard. *Leptonyx weddellii*. Antarctic Ocean. South Orkney.
3. Ross's large-eared Seal. *Ommatophoca rossi*. Antarctic Ocean.
4. Sea Leopard. *Stenorhynchus leptonyx*. Coast of New South Wales, Antarctic Ocean, and Port Nicholson, New Zealand.
5. Sea Elephant. *Morunga elephantina*. Antarctic Ocean.
6. Hooker's Seal. *Arctocephalus hookeri*. Antarctic Ocean.
7. Cowled Seal. *Arctocephalus lobatus*. North-west coast of Australia. (Hautman's Abrolhos.)
8. Falkland Seal. *Arctocephalus falklandicus*. Antarctic Ocean.
9. Grey Seal. *Arctocephalus cinereus*. South Coast of Australia, Kangaroo Island, Western Port.

The teeth of the Seals are generally hollow, more or less lobed (except the incisors and canines), and number 6 cutting teeth above and 4 below, 4 canines, 1 in each ramus, and from 20 to 24 grinders. The incisors or cutting teeth vary considerably in number.